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SUBJECT: FM DE GUCHT ENCOUNTERS RESOLUTE FM LAVROV IN MOSCOW

Classified By: DCM Wayne Bush, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian FM Lavrov told Belgian FM De Gucht September 3 that OSCE monitors would not be acceptable in South Ossetia, unless South Ossetian de facto president Kokoity approves them, nor would Russian troops be withdrawn from South Ossetia and Abkhazia because those troops are there at the request of what Russia now recognizes as independent countries. Monitors in other parts of Georgia and in a buffer zone around South Ossetia and Abkhazia would be acceptable, although Lavrov was focused on deployment of police along the buffer zone to, in essence, secure what would effectively become the "border" with Georgia. Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials gave a readout of Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht's September 3 meeting with Russian FM Lavrov in Moscow, describing Lavrov as resolute in his defense of Russia's actions in Georgia and in defense of South Ossetian and Abkhaz independence. The officials said Lavrov was contemptuous of Georgian President Saakashvili. Lavrov made it clear the IDP problem will have to be resolved with due regard for South Ossetia's putative independence and that it will take time to solve. He made no commitment on further troop withdrawals from other parts of Georgia, other than that they will occur. Lavrov also was willing to accept OSCE monitors on Georgian home territory but consistent with Russia's recognition of independence, said South Ossetian de facto president Kokoity would have the last word on monitors within South Ossetia. In sum, the Belgians found that the Russians hold views diametrically opposed to the Europeans' on Georgia's territorial integrity, on IDP's and on Saakashvili's legitimacy. The GOB believes that Russia's wider aim in the Georgia conflict is to split the Europeans, but also think that Russia's actions have actually pushed them closer together. De Gucht holds a special concern about Europe's energy security as it relates to access to the Caucasus and Central Asia and introduced a paragraph calling for special attention to the issue in the communique from the September 1 European Council extraordinary meeting. Georgian Prime Minister Gurgenzidze made a favorable impression when he met with Belgian and EU officials on September 2, when he outlined reconstruction needs and pushed for support of an IMF program for Georgia. Regarding Georgia's NATO aspirations, De Gucht's Chef de Cabinet allowed that Russia's new assertiveness may be turning opinion among NATO members, including Belgium, in favor of granting Georgia a membership action plan. End Summary.

LAVROV: "DEAL WITH KOKOITY"

¶2. (C) In separate meetings with Walter Stevens, FM De Gucht's Chef de Cabinet, and Willy De Buck, the MFA's Director for Central and Eastern Europe, DCM and Poloff received a readout of FM De Gucht's September 3 meeting in Moscow with Russian FM Lavrov. De Gucht's visit was his own and did not take place at the behest of the European Union, although De Buck said that his minister's message to Lavrov was coordinated with EU Foreign Minister Solana. However, as

it turned out, Lavrov was not in a mood to listen to De Gucht. Stevens described Lavrov's attitude as "combative" and added that the Russian FM was well-prepared. He warned that French President Sarkozy and EU Commission President Barosso will not have an easy time moving the Russians during their upcoming meetings in Moscow.

13. (C) He spoke about Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia only in terms of the breakaway regions' independence. For example, Lavrov pointedly rejected De Gucht's characterization of the Georgians displaced from South Ossetia as "internally displaced persons", insisting on calling them international "refugees." De Buck went so far as to say that Lavrov gave the impression that ethnic cleansing of Georgians from South Ossetia was in fact a Russian aim in the conflict and that the GOR wants to stabilize the situation around that reality.

14. (C) Lavrov's principal focus was on the perceived need to secure South Ossetia and Abkhazia from potential Georgian aggression. Stevens said that Lavrov had no problem with the presence of international police or monitors in the territory of Georgia proper or in the buffer zones the Russians have established on the Georgian side of the de facto borders. However, as de Buck put it, Lavrov's attitude with regard to a presence in South Ossetia, including a buffer zone on that side of the line, was "talk to Kokoity." Stevens said that he encountered in Lavrov an absolute resistance to any international presence in South Ossetia itself, except perhaps for the eight OSCE monitors who operated in Tskhinvali before the conflict broke out. The Russians supported their stance by saying they and the Ossetians do

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not want to take responsibility for outsiders' security and do not want to weaken the region's claim to independence. They seem to be fine with having international police or monitors take responsibility for patrolling the buffer zone in Georgia for the benefit of South Ossetia, Stevens said. Also, Lavrov showed no willingness to withdraw Russia's troops from South Ossetia and Abkhazia, arguing they are there at the request of their governments. Stevens said that in justifying his position, Lavrov made much of alleged differences in the text of the six-point agreement, for example, arguing that the agreement talked about international security "for" South Ossetia, not "in" South Ossetia and allowed for more than one "mechanism." Lavrov told De Gucht that the Russians will pull out of Poti, but he offered no timetable for a withdrawal.

15. (C) In his conversation with De Gucht, when Saakashvili's name was mentioned, Lavrov referred to him as "a sick man", possibly on drugs, and "politically dead." For his part, De Buck was understanding of the pressure under which Saakashvili is operating, but he sees some of it originating from within Saakashvili and not only from Russia. He said that Belgium sees a need going forward to discuss human rights issues frankly with the GOG. As an example of behavior which detracts from Georgia's case as a candidate for NATO and the European Union, he cited the repeated refusal of the Georgian parliament to discuss the Sozar Subari's ombudsman report on violations of human rights in the election periods of 2008.

RUSSIA'S AIM: SPLIT THE EUROPEANS

16. (C) De Buck said that it was clear to the Belgians that Russia's wider aim in the Georgian conflict is to divide Europe and weaken the Trans-Atlantic alliance. "Georgia is the test case," he said. In fact, Russia's action has had the opposite effect it intended. The Europeans are closer than they have ever been, De Gucht concluded. Stevens' opinion is that the Russians are trying to put themselves "back on the map with forces." He was surprised by Lavrov's indifference to possible difficulties in international

organizations like the WTO. In that regard, Lavrov told him that Russia intends to retract privileges already granted, for example in opening the banking sector, despite likely negative impact on investors. De Gucht told Lavrov that he had already met one Belgian investor who had canceled his nearly completed investment because of doubts about the direction of Russia's business climate. cornerstone

PRIORITIES: ENERGY SECURITY AND RECONSTRUCTION

17. (C) One special concern of Belgium and De Gucht is Europe's energy security. De Buck and Stevens noted that it was the Belgians who inserted a paragraph in the September 1 conclusions by the presidency of the extraordinary European Council that invites the Council and the Commission to examine initiatives to diversify sources and routes of Europe's energy supply. De Gucht is actively promoting the pressing need for Europe to deal with Russia as a single "cartel" of consumers. De Buck said he thinks that much progress on the European approach to Georgia and Russia can be made at the informal Gymnich discussions taking place September 5-6 in Avignon, France. He continued that Belgium sees the first priority in the Georgian case as humanitarian aid and recovery assistance. The next priority is reconstruction and rebuilding assistance from the EU, but De Gucht doesn't want the EU to "bite off more than it can chew." Finally, he sees the need to elaborate of an entirely new negotiation process for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

18. (C) Georgian Prime Minister met with Belgian and EU officials in Brussels on September 2 to outline Georgia's needs for assistance. De Buck said that Gurgenedze's presentation was particularly well-organized and that Belgian officials were impressed with him. He said that Gurgenedze had focused on securing Belgian support for an IMF program for Georgia and that Gurgenedze did not discuss his ideas for a "Phoenix Fund", which would concentrate foreign donations for Georgia's reconstruction into one mechanism for distribution. Stevens said that "the money will flow in" from international donors to Georgia and perhaps in a few years the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, reliant on Russia for assistance, will regret that they are not with Georgia.

NATO MAP: MAYBE A NEW VIEW

19. (C) Stevens, the more senior official, said that the events in Georgia had caused many of his European colleagues

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to think more carefully about what Russia's intentions may be in Ukraine. As a result, Georgia's and Ukraine's chances for a NATO membership action plan in December may be better than they were before the Russians struck. De Buck was more cautious, saying that Georgia's IPAP commitments have not yet been fulfilled and there is work to do on human rights, economic and military matters before Georgia is ready.

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